

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3, 4, 6 through 10, 12 through 19, and 21 through 25 and new Claim 26 are pending in the application.

Claims 1 and 25 have been amended to reflect advantageous food casings having overlapping shirring pleats. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed, for example on Page 4, lines 13 through 18.

Claim 3 has been amended to reflect beneficial embodiments in which the intrinsically shirred food casing has a sigma-5 value to $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed, for example on Page 4, line 32 through Page 5, line 2.

Claim 3 has been amended to depend from Claim 1. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed.

Claims 16 and 17 have been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer to the filing of continuing applications thereon.

Claim 22 has been amended to reflect that the recited corona treatment increases the adhesion of the individual shirred pleats to one another. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed, for example on Page 6, lines 27 through 28.

Claim 23 has been amended to emphasize the delineation between the various synthetic polymer mixture components as well as the groups closed nature. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed.

Claim 23 has further been amended to provide proper antecedent basis for the recited polyvinylacetate. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed.

Claim 24 has been amended to reflect advantageous embodiments in which the water-soluble polymer is polyvinylpyrrolidone. Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed, for example on Page 6, line 5.

Claim 25 has been to reflect beneficial embodiments in which the intinsically shirred food casing has a sigma-5 value of "below" 20/20 N/mm². Support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed, for example on Page 4, line 32 through Page 5, line 1.

Claim 26 has been added to complete the record for examination and highlight advantageous embodiments of the invention.

Claim 26 is directed to expedient food casings incorporating amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12.

Applicants respectfully submit that this response does not raise new issues, but merely places the above-referenced application either in condition for allowance, or alternatively, in better form for appeal. Reexamination and reconsideration of this application, withdrawal of all rejections, and formal notification of the allowability of the pending claims are earnestly solicited in light of the remarks which follow.

Section 112 Rejection

Claims 1 and 25 stand rejected over the recitation "water vapor permeability of 20 to 1000 g/m²." As correctly noted by the Examiner, the Application-as-filed notes water vapor permeabilities having an upper end point of 1000 g/m²d and a lower endpoint of 20 g/m²d. In that regard, the Examiner's attention is kindly directed to the Application-as-filed on Page 7, lines 4 through 6. Particularly, the Application-as-filed clearly conveys that Applicants were in possession of films having a water vapor permeability that ranges anywhere from 5 to 1000 g/m²d, including 20 g/m²d. Accordingly, the Application-as-filed clearly conveys to one skilled in the art that Applicants had possession of the claimed invention. Applicants further

respectfully submit that Claims 1 and 25 in no way indicate that only the most preferable embodiments are included within their scope, as apparently urged within the outstanding Office Action. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the foregoing rejection.

Claim 3 stands rejected over the recitation "sigma-5 value of less than $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$ ". As correctly noted by the Examiner, the Application-as-filed indicates that inventive films may have a sigma-5 value below $20/20 \text{ N/mm}^2$, i.e. any sigma-5 value greater than 0 but less than $20/20 \text{ N/mm}^2$, including a sigma-5 value of $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$. In that regard, the Examiner's attention is kindly directed to the Application-as-filed on Page 4, line 32 through Page 5, line 2. As $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$ is less than $20/20 \text{ N/mm}^2$, Applicants respectfully submit that the Application-as-filed clearly conveys to one skilled in the art that the inventors had possession of casings having a sigma-5 value of less than $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$. Without further addressing the merits of the rejection and solely to advance prosecution of the case, Claim 3 has been amended to recite that the inventive films may have a "sigma-5 value to $10/10 \text{ N/mm}^2$ " in lieu of "less than." As noted above, support for the foregoing amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the foregoing rejection.

Claim 23 stands rejected over the components within the recited synthetic polymer mixture. Claim 23 has been amended to emphasize the delineation between the various synthetic polymer mixture components, thereby indicating that only a single copolyamide is present within the overall synthetic polymer mixture embodied within Claim 23. As noted above, support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the foregoing rejection.

Claim 23 stands further rejected over a lack of antecedent basis for the recited polyvinylacetate. Claim 23 has been amended to reflect that the recited polyvinylacetate is a water soluble polymer, thus providing proper antecedent basis as kindly suggested by the Examiner. As noted above, support for this amendment can be found in the Application-as-filed. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the foregoing rejection.

*The Claimed Invention is Patentable
in Light of the Art of Record*

Claims 1, 3, 4, 6 through 10, 12 through 19 and 21 through 25 stand rejected in light of United States Patent No. 7,001,635 ("US 635") to Merritt et al. in view of United States Patent No. 5,773,059 ("US 059") to Delius et al.; United States Patent No. 6,203,750 ("US 750") to Ahlgren et al. and United States Patent No. 5,399,427 ("US 427") to Stenger. Claim 22 stands as anticipated by United States Patent No. 4,391,302 ("US 302") to Huhn.

It may be useful to briefly consider the invention before addressing the merits of the rejection.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that food casings, especially sausage casings, are predominantly offered in shirred form. Cellulose-based shirred casings, such as those disclosed in US 635, are known. Shirred sticks formed from synthetic polymers are also known; however, such shirred sticks are generally not very stable without net-type or reinforcing packaging, and are thus not in widespread use. Heretofore known synthetic polymer-based casings exhibit a relatively high resilience, resulting in the re-expansion of the shirred stick and associated pleat loss. (In that regard, the Examiner's attention is kindly directed to the Application-as-filed on Page 2, lines 1 through 14, as well as US 834, Para. 0016, fifth sentence).

In addition to shirred pleat stability, polymer-based food casings should advantageously provide a balance of additional properties, including only modest bending of the shirred tube (thereby avoiding the conventional external reinforcement) and acceptable water vapor permeability.

Unexpectedly, Applicants have found synthetic polymer blends that may be used to form food casings exhibiting a heretofore unknown balance of beneficial properties, including shirred stick stability, advantageous tensile properties and water vapor permeability.

Applicants have more particularly found that food casings formed from a particular blend of "soft" polymers that includes aliphatic copolyamide and at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymer provides a highly advantageous balance of adequate stiffness, shirr stability and water vapor permeability, as recited in the claimed invention.

Specifically, Applicants have found that polymer blends including (i) amide polymer consisting of aliphatic copolyamide that includes nylon 6/6 and/or nylon 6/12 and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymer can be used to form intrinsically stable shirred food casings that bend under the effect of their own weight by no more than 20 % and exhibits a water vapor permeability of 20 to 1000 g/m² d.

Applicants have further determined that targeted shirring pleating imparts particularly high insensitivity to bending and folding stress within inventive casings formed from the claimed polymer composition. In such targeted shirring pleating, particularly the newly recited overlapping pleats, the resulting increased contact surface area and frictional surface area enlargement translates into greater intrinsic shirr stability. In that regard, the Examiner's attention is kindly directed to the Application-as-filed on Page 4, lines 10 through 18.

In additional advantageous embodiments, the inventive shirred casing further comprises at least one of (i) an outer coating of oil or water and (ii) an outer surface tension of 40 to 50 mN/m imparted by corona treatment increasing the adhesion of the individual shirred pleats to one another, resulting in a shirred casing extends in the longitudinal direction by no more than 10% when it is stored on a smooth, planar support, without packaging, at room temperature and 60 % relative humidity, as recited in Claim 22 as-amended.

Applicants respectfully submit that the cited references do not teach or suggest the claimed invention.

Applicants respectfully submit that US 059 is directed to casings from an amide polymer blend containing nylon-6 polyamide. (Col. 2, lines 50 – 60). US 059 initially indicates that polymer selection greatly affects the resulting casing. (Col. 2, lines 16 – 29, noting the detrimental effects of polyester). US 059 goes on to teach the incorporation of long chain copolyamides into nylon-6 polyamide to form casings that are sufficiently supple for manual filling, which US 059 indicates is performed at a pressure lower than mechanical stuffing. (Col. 2, lines 53 – 67 and Col. 5, lines 47 - 50). The polyamide blends of US 059 may further include an optional aromatic copolyamide and/or carboxyl modified polyolefin. (Col. 3, lines 2 – 9). US 059 indicates that its casings encloses scalded sausages “significantly more tightly” than a casing made entirely of nylon 6 polyamide. (Col. 4, lines 49 – 54). US 059 merely generically notes that its casings may be “shirred in sections” to form “concertinas.” (Col. 6, lines 3 – 4). The Working Examples of US 059 generally include an aromatic nylon, along with up to 80 parts by weight nylon 6 polyamide. (Col. 6, line 30 – Col. 7, line 35).

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 059, requiring nylon 6 polyamide, does not teach or suggest advantageous food casings formed from amide polymer consisting of aliphatic copolyamide, much less nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12 copolyamide, as recited in Claims 1 and 25. In contrast to the urgings within the outstanding Office Action on Page 9, Ref. No. 13, Claim 1 restricts all amide polymers within the polymer mixture to aliphatic copolyamides, although the claim does remain open in respect to polymers other than amide polymers, i.e. the amide polymer element is limited to the recited members by the “consisting of” phrase recited immediately thereafter in conformance with MPEP 2111.03. Applicants further respectfully submit that the required nylon 6 amide polymer of US 059, formed entirely from repeating units of caprolactam, is a polyamide, not the recited copolyamide.

Nor does US 059 teach or suggest that inventive food casings excluding polyamides such as nylon 6, would, without separate support, exhibit sufficient intrinsic stability to be processed on fully automatic stuffing machines, as further recited in Claims 1 and 25. US 059 instead

suggest that its nylon 6 polyamide imparts the rigidity required for automatic stuffing machines.

US 059 thus cannot teach or suggest that the inventive shirred food casings would bend under the effect of its own weight by no more than 20 % in the absence of polyamide, as further recited in Claims 1 and 25. US 059 instead teaches away from the inventive casings by suggesting that nylon-6-free casings would be overly supple.

And US 059 most certainly does not teach or suggest that such food casings with overlapping shirring pleats would produce food casings having improved intrinsic stability, as reflected within the claims as-amended.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 059, directed solely to a polyamide blend, likewise fails to teach or suggest casings formed from a mixture containing a single copolyamide, much less a single copolyamide combined with polyether block amide and partially or completely saponified polyvinylacetate, as recited in Claim 23.

US 059, requiring nylon 6, similarly fails to teach or suggest inventive food casings formed from (i) amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12, and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, polyether block amides, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymers, as recited in newly added Claim 26.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully reiterate that the claimed invention is patentable in light of US 059, considered either alone or in combination with the remaining art of record.

US 427 is likewise directed to a blend of amide polymers used to form low-shrink food casings that have an improved barrier to UV light and "high constancy in stretching." (Col. 2, lines 49 – 51). US 427 indicates that casings incorporating copolyamide blends containing nylon 6/12 or nylon 6/66 suffer from unsteady stretching behavior. (Col. 2, lines 12 – 30). The casings of US 427 are formed from a mixture of polyamide and a partially aromatic copolyamide that

further includes a pigment having a particle size of from about 0.01 to about 15 microns. (Col. 3, lines 24 – 33). The casings of US 427 include up to 89.5 % linear polyamide and up to 50 % of aromatic co-polyamide. (Col. 4, lines 3 – 5 and Col. 4, lines 34 - 36).. Polyamides for incorporation in US 427 include nylon 6, nylon 11 and nylon 12 to be very advantageous polyamides. (Col. 3, line 67 – Col. 4, line 2). Suitable aromatic groups include isophthalic acid and terephthalic acid. (Col. 4, lines 27 – 28). US 427 is altogether silent as to shirring.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 427, requiring both polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, does not teach or suggest advantageous food casings formed from amide polymer consisting of aliphatic copolyamide, much less nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12 copolyamide, as recited in Claims 1 and 25

Nor does US 427 teach or suggest that inventive food casings excluding polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, would, without separate support, exhibit sufficient intrinsic stability to be processed on fully automatic stuffing machines, as recited in Claims 1 and 25.

US 427 thus cannot teach or suggest that the inventive shirred food casings would bend under the effect of its own weight by no more than 20 % in the absence of polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, as further reflected in Claims 1 and 25.

And US 427, altogether silent as to shirring, most certainly does not teach or suggest that such food casings with overlapping shirring pleats would produce food casings having improved intrinsic stability, as reflected within the claims as-amended.

US 427, directed solely to a polyamide blend, similarly fails to teach or suggest casings formed from a mixture of a single copolyamide, much less a single copolyamide combined with polyether block amide and partially or completely saponified polyvinylacetate, as recited in Claim 23.

US 427, requiring linear polyamide to offset the unsteady stretching of nylon 6/12 or nylon 6/66, similarly fails to teach or suggest inventive food casings formed from (i) amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12, and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, polyether block amides, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymers, as recited in newly added Claim 26.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully reiterate that the claimed invention is patentable in light of US 427, considered either alone or in combination with the remaining art of record.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 635 is generally directed to cellulosic casings containing liquid smoke that provide an enhanced smoky color and flavor to foods via an alkaline treatment. (Col. 1, lines 6 through 10 and Col. 6, lines 9 through 24). US 635 merely generically notes that casings formed from polymeric materials may be used within its invention. (Col. 6, lines 55 – 57). US 635 applies the liquid smoke prior to or during shirring. (Col. 8, lines 27 – 34). In contrast to the inventive intrinsically stable shirred casings, US 635 further expressly teaches that its casings are treated on the inside with a shirring solution to form self-sustaining sticks that “have sufficient coherency to hold together immediately after shirring through shipping and ultimate use.” (Col. 7, lines 10 – 12 and Col. 8, line 67 – Col. 9, line 5). The shirring solution used to form the working examples of US 635 incorporates carboxymethyl cellulose. (Col. 11, lines 24 – 43). US 635 merely notes that tubular casings are typically gathered into compressed shirred sticks using “well know processes and equipment.” (Col. 6, line 65 – Col. 7, line 1).

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 635, solely directed to cellulosic casings, does not teach or suggest advantageous food casings formed from amide polymer consisting of aliphatic copolyamide, much less nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12 copolyamide, as recited in Claims 1 and 25

Nor does US 635 teach or suggest that inventive food casings excluding polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, would, without separate support, exhibit sufficient intrinsic stability to be

processed on fully automatic stuffing machines, as recited in Claims 1 and 25.

US 635 thus cannot teach or suggest that the inventive shirred food casings would bend under the effect of its own weight by no more than 20 % in the absence of polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, as further reflected in Claims 1 and 25.

And US 635, generically noting shirring via “well known processes”, most certainly does not teach or suggest that such food casings with overlapping shirring pleats would produce food casings having improved intrinsic stability, as reflected within the claims as-amended.

US 635, directed solely to cellulosic casings, similarly fails to teach or suggest casings formed from a mixture of a single copolyamide, much less a single copolyamide combined with polyether block amide and partially or completely saponified polyvinylacetate, as recited in Claim 23.

US 635 similarly fails to teach or suggest inventive food casings formed from (i) amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12, and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, polyether block amides, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymers, as recited in newly added Claim 26.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully reiterate that the claimed invention is likewise patentable in light of US 635, considered either alone or in combination with the remaining art of record.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 750 is directed to multilayered heat shrinkable casings suitable for cook-in use. (Col. 2, lines 5 – 7). The films of US 750 include a layer having a mixture of at least two polyamides having differing crystalline structures, which is said to allow orientation via hot water or steam. (Col. 2, lines 17 – 29; Col. 5, lines 1 – 5, and Col. 16, lines 10 - 18). US 750 specifically indicates that its impetus is that a layer of “predominantly

nylon 6" can be readily oriented by adding a "secondary" polyamide. (Col. 16, lines 10 – 18). US 750 generically notes that apparatus for producing shirred casings are "known" for preparing "pleated and compressed" casings. (Col. 14, lines 58 – 61). US 750 indicates compression ratios of 40:1 as acceptable, noting that the compression ratio may be "even greater." (Col. 14, lines 58 – 63). US 750 merely generically notes that various of its working examples were "shirred." (Col. 19, lines 46 – 47 and Col. 20, lines 20 – 21). US 750 further notes that the shirred casing may be sheathed inside "a retaining sleeve." (Col. 13, lines 27 – 28). Evidencing conventional wisdom, US 750 teaches that copolymers are "formed by the polymerization of at least two different monomers." (Col. 8, lines 11 – 13). US 750 further teaches that polymer names including a backslash, i.e. "/", identifies comonomers used to produce the copolymer. (Col. 8, lines 51 – 54).

Applicants respectfully reiterate that US 750, generally directed to nylon 6-based films, does not teach or suggest advantageous food casings formed from amide polymer consisting of copolyamide, much less nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12 copolyamide, as recited in Claims 1 and 25

Nor does US 750 teach or suggest that inventive food casings excluding polyamide, would, without separate support, exhibit sufficient intrinsic stability to be processed on fully automatic stuffing machines, as recited in Claims 1 and 25.

US 750 thus cannot teach or suggest that the inventive shirred food casings would bend under the effect of its own weight by no more than 20 % in the absence of polyamide and aromatic copolyamide, as further reflected in Claims 1 and 25.

And US 750, generically noting shirring, most certainly does not teach or suggest that such food casings with overlapping shirring pleats would produce food casings having improved intrinsic stability, as reflected within the claims as-amended.

US 750, requiring at least two polyamides, similarly fails to teach or suggest casings

formed from a mixture of a single copolyamide, much less a single copolyamide combined with polyether block amide and partially or completely saponified polyvinylacetate, as recited in Claim 23.

US 750 likewise fails to teach or suggest inventive food casings formed from (i) amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12, and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters, polyurethanes, polyether block amides, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymers, as recited in newly added Claim 26.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully reiterate that the claimed invention is patentable in light of US 750, considered either alone or in combination with the remaining art of record.

Applicants respectfully reiterate that there likewise would have been no motivation to have combined the cited references. US 635 is directed to alkaline treatments for celluloseic liquid-smoke-transfer casings. US 059 is directed to casings formed from a nylon-6 blend that are sufficiently supple for manual filling. US 750 is directed to films formed from a mixture of polyamides that may be oriented using hot water or steam. US 427 is directed to casings formed from a polyamide blend that have an improved barrier to UV light and high constancy in stretching. These are altogether different issues, to say the least.

However, even if Applicants had combined US 635, US 059, US 750 and US 427 (which they did not) the present invention would not have resulted. Specifically, none of the cited references teaches or suggests the recited synthetic polymers, much less that intrinsically stable casings could be formed from the recited synthetic polymers having overlapping shirring pleats. The cited references each clearly teach the use of altogether different polymers to form casings, and in no way teach or suggest the use of overlapping shirring pleats.

More specifically, the combination simply does not teach or suggest advantageous food casings formed from amide polymer consisting of aliphatic copolyamide, much less nylon 6/66

and/or nylon 6/12 copolyamide, as recited in Claims 1. Applicants further respectfully reiterate that to alter US 059 so as to avoid its required nylon 6 or alter US 427 so as to avoid its required polyamide and aromatic copolyamide would altogether change their principle of operation, hence their combination with the remaining art of record is improper. Similarly, to alter previously cited US 750 so as to avoid its polyamide (i.e. "predominantly nylon 6") would altogether change its principle of operation, as well.

Nor does the combination teach or suggest that inventive food casings excluding polyamides such as nylon 6, would, without separate support, exhibit sufficient intrinsic stability to be processed on fully automatic stuffing machines, as recited in Claims 1 and 25.

The combination thus cannot teach or suggest that the inventive shirred food casings would bend under the effect of its own weight by no more than 20% in the absence of polyamide, as further recited in Claims 1 and 25. US 059 instead teaches away from the inventive casings by suggesting that nylon-6-free casings would be overly supple. The remainder of the cited references likewise fail to cure this deficiency.

And the combination most certainly does not teach or suggest that such food casings with overlapping shirring pleats would produce food casings having improved intrinsic stability, as reflected within the claims as-amended.

Nor does the combination teach or suggest casings formed from a mixture of a single copolyamide, much less a single copolyamide combined with polyether block amide and partially or completely saponified polyvinyl acetate, as recited in Claim 23. Each of US 059, US 427 and US 750 require specific amide polymer blends, while US 635 is generally directed to cellulosic casings.

The combination likewise fails to teach or suggest inventive food casings formed from (i) amide polymer consisting of nylon 6/66 and/or nylon 6/12, and (ii) at least one further polymer selected from the group consisting of ionomers, ethylene/(meth)acrylic acid esters,

polyurethanes, polyether block amides, copolyesters, biodegradable polyesters, and water-soluble polymers, as recited in newly added Claim 26.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the claimed invention is patentable in light of US 635, US 059, US 750 and US 427, considered either alone or in any combination.

Claim 22 is likewise patentable in light of US 302.

US 302 is directed to coupled tubular casings. (Col. 1, line 4). US 302 joins two casings by angling the ends of two tubular casings and joining them end-to-end via a flat coupling piece. (Col. 2, lines 38 – 44). The cited working example US 302 was subjected to corona treated to increase its surface energy prior to coating with an initial bonding agent that was applied to provide adhesion to a subsequent polyvinylidene chloride copolymer top coat. (Col. 6, lines 44 – 59). In contrast to the urgings of the outstanding Office Action on Page 4, Ref. No. 8, US 302 notes that its inventively coupled casings have a rigidity value, specifically a “Rigidity S wet Average value”, of 47. (Col. 8, lines 11 – 45).

US 302, merely noting a rigidity value resulting from its coupling configuration, does not teach or suggest the recited corona treatment imparting an outer surface tension of 40 to 50 mN/m.

And US 302, merely noting surface treatment prior to coating with a bonding agent, most certainly does not teach or suggest the claimed corona treatment to increase the adhesion of the individual shirred pleats to one another, as further recited in Claim 22 as-amended. Considered for all that it teaches, US 302 instead clearly suggests use of a bonding agent for improved adhesion, not corona treatment.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that US 302 does not teach or suggest the claimed invention, considered either alone or in combination with any or all of the art of record.

CONCLUSION

It is respectfully submitted that Applicants have made a significant and important contribution to the art, which is neither disclosed nor suggested in the art. It is believed that all of pending Claims 1, 3, 4, 6 through 10, 12 through 19, and 21 through 26 are now in condition for immediate allowance. It is requested that the Examiner telephone the undersigned if any questions remain to expedite examination of this application.

It is not believed that extensions of time or fees are required, beyond those which may otherwise be provided for in documents accompanying this paper. However, in the event that additional extensions of time and/or fees are necessary to allow consideration of this paper, such extensions are hereby petitioned under 37 CFR § 1.136(a), and any fee required is hereby authorized to be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-2193.

Respectfully submitted,

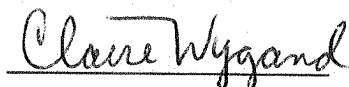


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